

Oedipus the Tyrant

Characters

Oedipus [tyrant of Thebes]¹

Elderly Priest of Zeus

Creon [brother of Jocasta]

Chorus of old Theban men

Teiresias [aged seer]

Jocasta [wife of Oedipus]

Messenger [from Corinth]

Servant of Laius

Messenger [from Thebes]

Oedipus: Oh children, young nurslings of ancient Cadmus,²
Whatever are these seats you have thronged to take,
Wreathed, and with suppliant olive branches?
The city teems with incense, and
With paeans³ for health, simultaneously with lamentations. 5
And I, having deemed it just, children, not through messengers,
Not through others, to hear, have myself thus come:
He who is famous in name to all as Oedipus.
But do you speak, elder—since by nature it is fitting for you to
Speak on behalf of these: in what disposition do you sit here? 10
In fear, or in affectionate longing? I am willing

¹ Bracketed material lacks manuscript authority.

² The name of the hero who founded Thebes, and hence also a name for the city itself.

³ Hymns to Apollo, in times of danger, especially in battle and disease.

To gratify you in every way; for I would be hard-hearted
Not to pity such supplication as this.

Elderly Priest Oh Oedipus, the master of my land!
of Zeus: You see us, of such an age as we are, seated 15
At your altars: some who are not yet for a long flight
Strong enough; others who are priests weighed down
with old age.
I am of Zeus, and these here are
Select unmarried youths. The rest of the tribe are seated,
wreathed,
In supplication in the agoras, before the twin temples
of Pallas Athena, 20
And at the prophetic ash of Ismenus.⁴
For the city—as you yourself perceive—already
Makes all-too-heavy weather, and can her head
No longer lift above the bloodred swell;
The land is blighted in its buds ready to bear fruit; 25
Blighted in its offspring of grazing cattle herds,
And in the barrenness of the women. And the fever-
bringing god,
Most hateful Plague, strikes the city,
Emptying the Cadmean house and
Enriching dark Hades with lamentations and groans. 30
Now, as equal to the gods you are not put by me, nor by
These children, when we sit here in supplication at the
hearths;
But, as first among men, in the vicissitudes of life,
We do judge you to be, and also in dealings with the
divinities.
For you came and liberated the Cadmean city from 35
The harsh Songstress's⁵ tribute which we were furnishing—and
This without learning from us, or being taught by us, any
special lore;
But by the help of a god,
As is said and believed, you put straight our life.
And now, oh head most powerful in every way of Oedipus! 40
We all supplicate you,
To find some defense for us—either by hearing some

⁴ One of the two rivers of Thebes; “the prophetic ash” seems to refer to some sort of sacrifice at the river.

⁵ The Sphinx.

Utterance of the gods, or by something you know from a man;
 Since it is for those who are experienced, I observe, that
 The putting together of deliberations is especially vigorous. 45
 Come, oh best of mortals! Set the city upright again!
 Come, take care! For it is you that this earth now
 Calls “savior,” on account of your zealous spirit in time before.
 Let it not be our memory of your rule
 That we stood upright, and then fell; 50
 Rather, that we were safe in this city, set upright again.
 With a favorable bird omen, luck was what in time before
 You gave us; in the present, become the same!
 For if indeed you will rule the land which you dominate,
 It is nobler to dominate it with men, than when empty. 55
 For neither tower nor ship amount to anything
 Bereft of men dwelling within.

Oedipus: Oh you pitiable children! To me known, and not unknown,
 Are the things that you have come longing for: I know well that
 You are all ill, and that yet in your illness 60
 There is no one among you who is as ill as I.
 For *your* pain comes only to each one himself,
 And to no one else; but *my* soul
 Groans for the city and for myself and for you simultaneously.
 So you are not awakening me as one lying asleep in bed. 65
 But know that I have indeed wept many tears,
 And have traveled many paths in the wandering of my prudence.
 And what I have found through investigation to be the sole cure,
 This I have acted upon. For the child of Menoeceus,
 Creon, my brother-in-law, 70
 I have sent to the Pythian abode of Phoebus,⁶ to learn what
 I might do or what I might say, so that I may defend this city.
 And the date now, measured by the time passed,
 Troubles me, as to how he fares. For it is beyond what
 Is reasonable that he is away—more than the appointed time. 75
 But when he arrives, I would be wicked
 If I did not do the whole extent of whatever the god may reveal.

Priest: But you speak with beautiful timing, since these here have just
 Informed me of the approach of Creon!

Oedipus: Oh Lord Apollo, may he with saving fortune 80
 Come, bright as are his eyes!

⁶ The “Pythian abode” is Delphi; Phoebus, an epithet of Apollo, means “radiant.”

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- Priest:* Well, my guess is that he brings what is pleasing, since otherwise
He would not come thus—head crowned with flowering laurel.
- Oedipus:* We'll know soon. For he's about within hearing distance.
Lord! My in-law, child of Menoeceus! 85
What pronouncement of the god do you come bringing to us?
- Creon:* A noble one. For I say that even hardships, if fortune
Should have them turn out right, would bring entire good
fortune.
- Oedipus:* What sort of word is this? For neither emboldened nor
In trepidation am I, by this present speech at least. 90
- Creon:* If you choose to hear with these close by,
I am prepared to speak—but also after going inside.
- Oedipus:* Speak out before all!—because, for these here I bear more
The grief than that concerning my own soul.
- Creon:* I would tell what things I heard from the god: 95
Lord Phoebus clearly has commanded us
To drive out of the land the pollution which has been
nourished
In this earth, and not to foster it, thus making it incurable.
- Oedipus:* With what sort of purification? What is the character of the
trouble?
- Creon:* By banishment, or, with slaughter, slaughter again dissolving: 100
Since this blood brings the storm upon the city.
- Oedipus:* Of what man does He reveal this fortune?
- Creon:* There was once, oh lord, a Laius who was authoritative
Over this land, before you straightened out the city.
- Oedipus:* I know well, by report—for I never actually saw him. 105
- Creon:* As regards this death, He now clearly commands
Retribution for the perpetrators.
- Oedipus:* But where on earth are they? Where will be found
This poorly witnessed trail of ancient guilt?
- Creon:* In this land, He declares. He who is sought 110
Can be caught; that which is not searched out escapes.
- Oedipus:* Was it within house walls, or out in the fields, or
In another part of the earth that Laius encountered this
slaughter?
- Creon:* Having announced that he was going to inquire of the
oracle, he
Did not ever return home again as he left. 115

- Oedipus:* Was there no messenger, or no fellow traveler of the road
Who knew, and from whom one could usefully learn?
- Creon:* They died, all except one who fled in fear,
And could express clearly nothing except one thing of what
he knew.
- Oedipus:* What was it? One thing might uncover many that could
be learned, 120
If we might take a small beginning of hope.
- Creon:* He reported that robbers fell upon them, killing not
With the strength of one, but with many hands.
- Oedipus:* So how would a robber, unless for money
He were involved in some intrigue here, have been so daring? 125
- Creon:* Such were the suspicions. But when Laius perished,
No defender arose, amid the evils.
- Oedipus:* What evil was the obstacle, when the tyranny
Had thus fallen, that prevented attaining knowledge of this?
- Creon:* The Sphinx of riddling song induced us to inquire into the 130
Things at our feet, and to let go what was unclear.
- Oedipus:* But I myself shall bring clarity back, from the beginning.
For worthily has Phoebus, and worthily have you,
Been so concerned for this dead one;
So that you will justly see me too as an ally 135
Effecting retribution for this earth and at the same time
for the god.
For not on behalf of removed loved ones,
But myself, on my own behalf, will remove this abomination.
For whoever it was who killed that man
Might be willing to take retribution with such a hand on
me as well! 140
So by aiding that man I benefit myself.
But as quickly as you can, children,
Get up from the seats, and take away these suppliant boughs.
And let someone else assemble here the Cadmean populace,
Since I am taking care of everything. For either we will
become 145
Manifestly of good fortune, with the god, or manifestly fallen.
- Priest:* Children, let's stand up. For it was for the sake of these things,
That this man is now announcing, that we came hither.
And may Phoebus, the one who has delivered these prophecies,
Also arrive as savior and arrester of the plague! 150

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Chorus: Oh sweet-worded Utterance of Zeus!⁷ Whoever
Are You, Who from Pytho,⁸ abundant-in-gold
To splendid Thebes comes?
I am racked with a fearful mind,
Quivering with anxiety—
Delian Paean,⁹ invoked by the cry!
And I gather in dreadful awe around You. 155
What debt from me—either new or such as will fall due as the
Seasons revolve—do You exact? Tell me, oh Child of
golden Hope,
Immortal pronouncement!
I call first upon You, Daughter of Zeus, immortal Athena!
And then upon You, Her Sister, You Who possess the land— 160
Artemis!—Who upon a round throne in the agora is seated,
In goodly fame; and upon Phoebus the far shooter: Oh!
Trio of protectors, make Yourselves manifest to me!
If ever in previous disasters
Rising up for the city, 165
You carried out an expulsion of the flame of woe,
Come also now!
Alas! Countless are the sufferings I bear!
My people are all sick;
Nor is there for a single person a weapon of thought 170
By which one may defend oneself.
For neither do the crops of the famous soil grow,
Nor do the women rise up from labor with
Prayerful cry of thanks for children;
But you might witness one after the other, 175
Like a well-winged bird,
Stronger than irresistible fire,
Flocking toward the shore of the evening god.¹⁰
The city is perishing in countless numbers!
Unpitied offspring lie at our feet, 180

⁷ Here Apollo's oracle, personified as itself a divinity, is spoken of as deriving ultimately from Zeus, Apollo's superior; see similarly 498–499 below.

⁸ I.e., Delphi.

⁹ Apollo, who is here invoked as “Delian” because the island of Delos was an especially sacred sanctuary of his, and as “Paean” after the hymns sung to him.

¹⁰ Hades, the god of the underworld, to which the shades of the dead fly.

Death-carrying, unlamented.
Wives and gray-haired mothers,
From all sides, at the edge of the altar
Groan as suppliants
In mournful toils. 185
And in the vicinity, the mournful voice sings clearly the Paeon:
In response to which, oh Golden Daughter of Zeus,
Send protection, fair in countenance!
And let raging Ares,
Who now, 190
Without His bronze shields,
Confronts me with fever and surrounding cries,
Turn tail in retreat—
Beyond the borders of the land of my fathers, either to the great
Mansion of Amphitrite,¹¹ 195
Or to those hostile-to-anchoring
Thracian waves!
For there is completion, if night lets something go;
This comes to pass in the day.
Let Him [Ares], oh You Who guide the force 200
Of the fire-bearing lightning—
Oh Father Zeus—be destroyed by Your thunderbolt!
Lycian Lord!¹² I would that Your
Shafts from the bowstring woven of gold
Would shower down, as irresistible 205
Defenses standing before us, alongside the fiery torches
Of Artemis, with which
She darts through the Lycian mountains.
And I invoke Him with the golden hair band,
After Whom this land is named— 210
Bacchus, of wine!—
Accompanied by the sacred cry of the Maenads,¹³
To approach, flaming with his
Flashing [a word is missing here]
Torch—against the god who is without honor among the gods!¹⁴ 215

¹¹ The Atlantic Ocean (Amphitrite is the sea goddess, and wife of Poseidon).

¹² Apollo, invoked as “Lycian” apparently because of his close association here with Artemis, who frequented Lycia.

¹³ Reveling nymphs and women who accompanied and celebrated Bacchus.

¹⁴ Ares, god of war.

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Oedipus: You pray; and in regard to the things concerning which
you pray,
If you are willing to listen to, and accept, my words,
and minister
To your illness, you shall receive strong help, and a lifting
of evils.
What I have to announce comes from one who is a
stranger to the report,
And a stranger to the deed that was done. For I would not 220
Have been long on the track, before I grasped something
that added up.
But now, since I became a townsman among the city's
townsmen later,
To all of you Cadmeans I proclaim the following things:
Whoever among you knows
By what man was slain Laius the son of Labdacus, 225
This man I order to indicate everything to me.
And if he is afraid, that by taking the charge on himself,
[A line is missing]
Himself against himself. For he will suffer no other
Hateful thing except safe exile from this land.
And if, again, someone knows that another, or someone from 230
Another land, is the slayer, let him not be silent. For
I will make him gain, and there will be gratitude besides.
But if, on the other hand, you remain silent, and if
someone out of fear
Seeks to keep this announcement away from some loved
one or from
Himself—then, what I shall do concerning these things he 235
should
Hearken to from me: this man I forbid—whoever he may be—
In this land, which I dominate and whose seats of power
I distribute,
To be received, or to be addressed by anyone,
Or to be given a share in prayers or sacrifices to the gods,
Or to receive distribution of sacred water. 240
He is to be thrust out of every house, as a pollution to us—
As the Pythian oracle of the god
Has just now revealed to me.
I thus become an ally with the divinity
And the dead man. 245

And I pray that the perpetrator, whether he has escaped notice
 Alone, or whether having acted with others,
 May wear out his life in wretched fate, evilly, as he is evil.
 And I further pray that if he be a sharer in the hearth of my
 Halls, with my knowledge, 250
 That I suffer the things that I have just cursed these with.
 And upon you I lay the responsibility, to see that all these things
 Be fulfilled, for my sake, and for the sake of the god, and
 for this
 Land thus in barrenness, and abandoned by the gods, ruined.
 Nor, even if the deed were not pursued by the god, 255
 Would it have been reasonable for you thus to let it go
 unpurified,
 Given that it involved the destruction of the best man,
 even the king;
 No, it was to be searched out. And now since I am in charge,
 Having the ruling offices that that man held before,
 And having the marriage bed and wife of the same seed,¹⁵ 260
 And sharing in the same children, if that man's offspring
 Had not been unfortunate—if they had grown
 (But now chance weighed on that man's head)—
 On account of these things, I—even as if for my own
 father—
 Wage the fight on his behalf, and I will go to any lengths 265
 In seeking the capture of the one whose hand perpetrated
 the murder:
 For the sake of the child of Labdacus, and of Polydorus, and
 Of Cadmus before him, and of ancient Agenor.¹⁶
 And for those who do not do these things, I pray that the gods
 Not allow them any husbandry of the land, 270
 Nor children from their wives,
 But that they perish by this very death, or by worse than this!
 But to you other Cadmeans, to as many as find
 These things acceptable, may the ally Justice
 And all the gods be present, in goodness forever. 275

¹⁵ In a lurid foreshadowing, Sophocles has Oedipus use a peculiarly strong term for a shared, and hence kindred, wife: *homosporos*; the word is used again, in the same sense, by the prophet Teresias cursing Oedipus at 460. The word elsewhere means “from the same parentage.”

¹⁶ Agenor was the father of Cadmus, whose son was Polydorus, whose son was Labdacus, grandfather of Oedipus.

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- Chorus:* As you have put me on oath, thus, lord, will I speak.
For I was not the killer, nor am I able to point out
The killer. But as regards the investigation, it belongs to
Phoebus,
Who enjoined it, to tell this, whoever it was who is the doer.
- Oedipus:* You have spoken just things. But to compel the gods 280
When They are unwilling is not in the power of a single man.
- Chorus:* I would like to say what is, in my opinion, second-best after this.
- Oedipus:* And even the third best do not omit, so as not to tell me.
- Chorus:* I know that on behalf of the Lord Phoebus, in seeing
these things,
It is especially the lord Teiresias—oh lord!—who would 285
Permit one to learn the clearest, if one were to inquire
about these matters.
- Oedipus:* But neither have I been negligent in doing this.
For I have, on Creon's suggestion, dispatched a pair of
emissaries;
And it amazes me that he is not here, after so long a time.
- Chorus:* Besides, the other reports are faint and old. 290
- Oedipus:* What ones are you talking about? I inquire into every
account!
- Chorus:* It was said that he died at the hands of certain wayfarers.
- Oedipus:* I too heard that. But no one sees the witness.
- Chorus:* And if he is at all fearful, at any rate,
He would not remain, after hearing your curses! 295
- Oedipus:* He who is not frightened at the deed will not be afraid
of a word.
- Chorus:* But here present is one to refute him; for they come
Thus conducting the divine prophet, in whom
Alone among mortals there grows by nature the truth.
- Oedipus:* Oh Teiresias who surveys all things, the teachable and 300
The unspeakable, the things of the heavens and those
treading the earth:
The city, even if you cannot see, you must all the same know,
Is beset with plague—from which you
Alone, lord, we discover to be the protector and savior.
For Phoebus (in case you haven't heard from the messengers) 305
Has sent a mission in response to our mission, to the
effect that the

Sole release from this disease would come
By our having learned well who were the killers of Laius,
And by then killing them or exiling them as fugitives
from the land.

So do not you begrudge, using an utterance from birds, 310
Or any other path of divination that you possess,
Delivering yourself and the city, and delivering me,
And delivering everything, from the pollution of the deceased;
For we are in your hands. And for a man to do benefit from
What he possesses and is able to do is the noblest of labors. 315

Teiresias: Alas! Alas! To understand is so terrible, where it does not profit
The knower! Knowing these things in so fine a fashion,
I blotted them out—for otherwise I would not have come
hither.

Oedipus: What is it? How disheartened you have arrived!

Teiresias: Let me go back home. For then most easily will you
bear your burden, 320
And I mine—if you will be persuaded by me.

Oedipus: The things you say are neither lawful nor affectionate to
this city
Which reared you, when you deprive it of this word!

Teiresias: But I see that it is your word that is
Amiss!—and I would not suffer the same myself. 325

Oedipus: Do not—before the gods!—if you are thinking at least, turn
away,
Since all of us are prostrate here as your suppliants!

Teiresias: Because all of you lack understanding! But I shall never
Utter my evils, nor pronounce your evils.

Oedipus: What are you saying? Are you in the know, but refuse to
speak out, 330
And do you knowingly betray us and destroy the city?

Teiresias: I will give pain neither to myself nor to you. Why do you
pointlessly
Cross-examine in regard to these matters? For you shall
not learn from me!

Oedipus: No! You most wicked of the wicked! For you would
anger even
Someone who had the nature of a stone! Will you refuse
to speak out, 335
But instead show yourself flinty and inconclusive?

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- Teiresias:* You've reproached my anger, while your own,
That is indwelling, you do not recognize, but instead blame me.
- Oedipus:* For who would not be angry, when it was such words
That he heard, as now you utter, dishonoring this city? 340
- Teiresias:* For the same things will come to pass even though I
stand in silence.
- Oedipus:* So then ought you not tell me *what* things will come to pass?
- Teiresias:* I would not speak further. In the face of this, if you will,
Rage, with this most savage anger!
- Oedipus:* Indeed, so angry am I that I will hold back nothing 345
Of what I comprehend. For know that it is my opinion
that you
Helped hatch the deed, and helped accomplish it, as much
as you could
Without killing him by your own hands! And if you
chanced to have sight,
I would have declared the deed yours alone!
- Teiresias:* Truly? I bid you to abide by 350
The proclamation which you have made, and from this very day
To address yourself neither to these here nor to me,
You being the impious pollution of this land!
- Oedipus:* Have you thus shamelessly uttered this?
And how in your opinion will you get away with this? 355
- Teiresias:* I have already gotten away. For I nourish the strength
of truth.
- Oedipus:* From whom did you learn this? For surely it was not from
your art.
- Teiresias:* From you. For you made me speak, unwillingly.
- Oedipus:* What then is your account? Speak again, so that I may
then learn!
- Teiresias:* Didn't you understand before? Or are you speaking to test me? 360
- Oedipus:* I can't say I understood; but say it again!
- Teiresias:* The murderer of the man, whose custody you seek, I
declare to be *you*!
- Oedipus:* But you will not take pleasure from having uttered so
baneful a thing twice!
- Teiresias:* Shall I say additional things, so that you may become yet
more angry?

- Oedipus:* As much as you wish; for it will be spoken in vain! 365
- Teiresias:* I declare that you, without knowing it, have mingled in
most shameful
Fashion with those dearest to you, without seeing how far
gone you are in evil!
- Oedipus:* Do you really suppose you can keep enjoying the saying
of these things?
- Teiresias:* If indeed there is strength in truth!
- Oedipus:* But there is, except in your case. For you, however, there is not, 370
Since you are blind in the ears and the mind as well as the eyes!
- Teiresias:* And you are miserable in these words of reproach, which
There is no one who will not soon use to reproach you!
- Oedipus:* And you are nourished by one continuous night, so that you are
Capable of harming neither me nor anyone else who
sees the light! 375
- Teiresias:* For it is not fated that I fall at your hands, since
Apollo suffices, in Whose care it is to carry out these things!
- Oedipus:* Are these devices Creon's, or whose?
- Teiresias:* Creon is no bane for you; you are for yourself!
- Oedipus:* Oh wealth, and tyranny, and art—surpassing art!— 380
In that much envied life!
How great is the jealousy that is stored up around you,
If for the sake of this rule, which the city to me
Gave, unasked, into my hands—
For the sake of this—Creon the trusted, the friend from
the beginning, 385
Creeping up in secret, longs to cast me out,
Having suborned such a scheming magician
And guileful beggar as this, who
Looks only for gain, and is blind by nature as regards art!
—For come, say, how are you clearly a prophet? 390
How was it that when the Dog of song¹⁷ was here,
You did not speak out a word of salvation for these townsmen?
And indeed, the riddle was not for any man who just
happened along
To solve, but rather needed a prophet!
As regards it, you were not conspicuous in knowing *anything*, 395

¹⁷ The Sphinx.

Either from the bird omens, or from the gods; but I came—
Oedipus, the one who knows nothing!—and put an end to it,
Hitting the mark by my judgment, not learning anything
from birds!

He it is whom you are trying to cast out, supposing that
You will stand close to the thrones of Creon. 400
You and the one who put together these things will in my
opinion lament
Your driving out of the pollution; and if you did not seem
to be aged,
You would come to know through suffering what sort
of things you've thought up!

Chorus: In our reckoning, the words both of this one
And of you, Oedipus, seem spoken in anger. 405
It is not about such things, but rather about how the
prophecies of the god
May best be discharged, that inquiry ought to be made.

Teiresias: Even if you are tyrant, there ought to be equal right
To speak back equally; for I too hold sway in this matter.
For I do not live in any way as slave to you, but rather to
Loxias;¹⁸ 410

So I have not been enrolled under Creon as patron.
And I say, since you have found fault with my blindness, that
You have not seen with open eyes how far gone you are
in evil,
Nor where you dwell, nor with whom you share your home.
Do you know from whom you are? And has it escaped
you that 415

You are enemy to your own, down below, and above, upon
the earth?
And a terrible-footed curse, striking from both sides, from
Mother and father, will someday drive you from this land!—
You who now see straight, but who then will see in darkness.
And where will not be the harbor of your cry? 420

Where? Will not the Cithaeron mountain range soon echo,
When you perceive the meaning of the harborless nuptial
song which
You sailed into as home, when you chanced upon a fair
sailing?

¹⁸ Loxias, an epithet of Apollo, means "Ambiguous One," in reference to the ambiguity of his oracles.

- And you do not perceive, in addition, a throng of other evils
Which will bring you down, along with your children. 425
So then in regard to these things go ahead and slander
Creon, and
My mouth; than you, there is no mortal who will
Ever grind out his life more horribly!¹⁹
- Oedipus:* Are these things not intolerable to hear from this fellow?
Will you not go to destruction? Will you not soon again
go back, 430
Away from these halls?
- Teiresias:* I would never have come, if you had not called me!
- Oedipus:* Well, I did not know that you would say something as a
fool, since
In that case I would never have summoned you to my halls!
- Teiresias:* We are born by nature such, as to seem to you to be fools; 435
But to your parents, who gave you birth, prudent.
- Oedipus:* To whom? Wait! Who among mortals gave me birth?
- Teiresias:* This very day will give you your birth, and destroy you!
- Oedipus:* How excessively enigmatic and unclear is everything
you utter!
- Teiresias:* Is it not you who are by nature best at discovering these things? 440
- Oedipus:* You reproach me for the very things in which you will
find me great!
- Teiresias:* This indeed is the luck that will destroy you!
- Oedipus:* But if it has saved this city, I don't care!
- Teiresias:* I depart now; and you, boy, conduct me.
- Oedipus:* Let him indeed conduct you, who, being present, are an 445
Encumbrance, and, being gone, would cause no more pain.
- Teiresias:* I depart, uttering that for the sake of which I came, and not
Fearing your face. For it is not possible that you destroy me.
But I say to you: this man, whom from old you seek,
Threatening and making proclamations concerning the murder 450
Of Laius—this man is *right here*,
Accounted a resident alien, who will become
Manifest as a native Theban; nor will he enjoy
His fate. For being blind after having had sight,
And a beggar instead of wealthy, to a foreign land 455

¹⁹ The words translated “more horribly” also mean “more wickedly.”

He will journey, pointing out the ground before him with
a stick.

And to his own children with whom he consorts, he will
become

Manifest as himself brother as well as father; and to the woman
From whom he was born, son as well as husband; and of
his father

Fellow-sower and murderer! Go inside and 460
Reason about these things; and if you catch me in a falsehood,
Proclaim then that I understand nothing of prophecy!

Chorus: Who is it whom the oracular
Delphic rock has said
Carried out the unspeakable of unspeakables, 465
With murderous hands?

The time has now come for him,
More vigorously than horses swift as storm,
To move his feet in flight.

For against him, armed, leaps 470
The Son of Zeus, with fire and lightning,
And around him follow the terrible,
Unerring, avenging Keres.²⁰

For there has flashed forth from snowy
Parnassus just now an evident 475
Utterance, putting all on the track of the hidden man.

He wanders up to the wild
Wood and through caves and
?As a bull over rocks? [text corrupt];
Miserable, with miserable foot; abandoned, 480
Fleeing the prophecies of the place that is the omphalos-center
Of the earth;²¹ but they, living forever,
Flit about him.

Terribly—yes, terribly—does the one who is wise in
bird omens

Disturb me, and I neither agree nor deny; 485
I am at a loss as to what I will say.
I flutter with hopes,

²⁰ Daughters of Night who are “ruthlessly punitive” (Hesiod, *Theogony* 217).

²¹ Delphi, or more precisely the round stone in the temple there that was understood to be the center of the earth; see also 897–898 below.

Seeing neither what is present nor past.
 For what quarrel lies, either on the part of the Labdacids or
 On the part of the son of Polybus,²² 490
 Either in the past or the present,
 I at least have not learned,
 Such as I could use
 As proof
 Against the public 495
 Pronouncement concerning Oedipus—I, acting as the
 defender of
 The Labdacids as regards the hidden deaths.
 But Zeus and Apollo are wise, and of the things of mortals
 Are knowers. As among men, however, whether a prophet
 Weighs more than I, 500
 There is no true judgment.
 By wisdom, however,
 A man may surpass wisdom.
 But never would I for my part,
 Before I saw a word that stands, 505
 Assent when others were blaming.
 For plainly against him
 The winged Maiden once came,
 And he was seen to be wise
 In the test, and pleasing to the city. 510
 On account of which, in my
 Mind he will never be convicted of wickedness.
Creon: Men, citizens! I, having learned the terrible words
 With which the tyrant Oedipus accuses me,
 Am here in outrage. For if in the present troubles 515
 He believes he has suffered something on my part
 That in words or deeds bears harm,
 Then there is not in me any desire for a long-lasting life—
 Bearing this awful repute. For it is not a simple penalty
 That this account imposes on me, 520
 But the greatest—if being wicked in the city,
 And wicked to you, and to dear ones, will be my fame!
Chorus: This blame was indeed laid, but probably through
 The violence of anger rather than by judgment of the mind.

²² The ruler of Corinth and the adoptive father of Oedipus (see 774ff. below).

Oedipus the Tyrant

- Creon:* Has the word been expressed that it was by my judgment that
The prophet was persuaded to speak deceitful words? 525
- Chorus:* These things were pronounced, but I know not with what
judgment.
- Creon:* But was it with steady eyes and a straight mind
That he laid this accusation concerning me?
- Chorus:* I don't know. For I do not see what the powerful do. 530
But here he comes now from within.
- Oedipus:* You there! How come you hither? Do you have the
Brazen face to arrive at my halls,
Being the manifest murderer of this man,
And the evident robber of my tyranny? 535
Come, speak, before the gods! What cowardice or stupidity
Did you see in me, that you plotted to do this?
Or did you suppose that I would not recognize in you
This stealthy deed, or would not defend myself if I did learn?
Is your enterprise not foolish— 540
Without the multitude or friends, to hunt for tyranny,
A thing which is captured with the multitude and with money?
- Creon:* Do you know what you should do? In response to what
has been said,
Listen in your turn, and then judge for yourself, once
you've learned.
- Oedipus:* You're a terribly clever speaker, but I am bad at learning 545
from you.
For I have discovered you to be ill disposed and grievous to me.
- Creon:* In this very regard first now hear what I shall say.
- Oedipus:* In this very regard do not explain to me how you are not evil!
- Creon:* If you believe stubbornness to be a worthwhile possession,
Apart from intelligence, you are not thinking correctly! 550
- Oedipus:* If you believe that a man who is a kinsman can act wickedly
and not undergo just punishment, you are not thinking well!
- Creon:* These things I agree to be justly spoken by you; but
Teach me what ill you claim to have suffered.
- Oedipus:* Did you, or did you not, persuade me that 555
I ought to send someone for the man who is a revered prophet?
- Creon:* And still now I am of this counsel!
- Oedipus:* For how long a time is it now since Laius . . .
- Creon:* Did what deed? For I do not know!

- Oedipus: Disappeared by a deadly disaster? 560
- Creon: A very long measure of time ago.
- Oedipus: So was this prophet at that time involved in his art?
- Creon: He was similarly wise, and equally honored.
- Oedipus: So did he make mention of me in that time?
- Creon: Not when I at any rate was anywhere nearby. 565
- Oedipus: But you did not hold an inquiry concerning the murderer?
- Creon: We did hold one: how could we not? But we didn't hear anything.
- Oedipus: How was it, then, that this "wise" man did not speak out these things?
- Creon: I don't know. I like to keep quiet about matters which I don't understand.
- Oedipus: But this much you know, and would speak about, if your mind were well disposed: 570
- Creon: —This much about *what*? For if I know, at least, I won't deny it.
- Oedipus: This: that if he hadn't been involved with you,
He would never have spoken about *my* destruction of Laius!
- Creon: If he says these things, you're the one who knows it; and
I justly claim
To learn from you the very same things you now claim
from me! 575
- Oedipus: Learn completely. For *I* will never be convicted of being
a murderer!
- Creon: What then? Are you married to my sister?
- Oedipus: There's no possibility of denying what you're inquiring about!
- Creon: And do you in ruling the land distribute an equal share to her?
- Oedipus: Whatever she wishes, she receives all from me. 580
- Creon: And am I not equal, as the third, to you two?
- Oedipus: Yes, and for this very reason you are manifestly a wicked friend!
- Creon: Not so, if you would give to yourself an account as I have.
But inquire first into this, if in your opinion someone
Would choose to rule with fears rather than 585
Sleeping without anxiety—if, that is, he will have the
same sway.
So I surely do not by nature desire

To be tyrant, rather than to do the tyrannical things;
Nor does anyone else who knows how to be moderate.
For now, I get from you everything, without fear; 590
But if I were myself to rule, I would do many things
unwillingly.

So how would tyranny be for me more pleasant to possess,
By nature, than a painless rule and dominion?
I shall never be so far deceived
As to crave anything other than the noble things
accompanied by gain. 595

Now, I enjoy everyone; now, everyone greets me;
Now, those who crave something from you call me aside.
For their fortune depends on this one thing.
How indeed could I take those things, when I would have
to give up these?

A mind that is prudently noble would never become bad. 600
But I am by nature not a passionate lover of this judgment,
Nor could I ever bear to help another in the deed.
And for conclusive proof of these things, go to the Pythian,
And inquire of the oracle, if I brought the message to you
clearly.

Then, if you catch me in common with the seer 605
Plotting something, kill me not by a single
Vote, but by a double, mine as well as yours!
But don't you, all on your own, accuse me, on the basis of
an unverified judgment.

Now it is not just to believe without warrant either the
wicked to be

Worthy or the worthy to be wicked. 610

For I say that the casting out of a noble friend is equivalent to
That of one's own life, which one most cherishes.

But in time you will know these things for sure, since
Time alone makes manifest the just man,
But the wicked you may recognize in a single day. 615

Chorus: Nobly has he spoken, lord, for anyone who is taking care
not to fall.

For those who think quickly do not think safely.

Oedipus: When someone moves quickly in what he has plotted secretly,
I too must deliberate swiftly in response!
But if I wait calmly, this fellow's deeds 620
Will be consummated—and my errors!

- Creon:* What then do you want? To send me into exile?
- Oedipus:* Not at all; your death, not your exile, is what I wish!
- Creon:* When you have shown what sort of thing envying is!
- Oedipus:* You speak as one who neither yields nor trusts. 625
- Creon:* For I see well that you are not thinking!
- Oedipus:* Except as regards what pertains to me!
- Creon:* But you ought equally to think of what pertains to me!
- Oedipus:* But you are by nature wicked!
- Creon:* And what if you understand nothing?
- Oedipus:* One must be ruled by me anyway!
- Creon:* No: not by one who rules wickedly!
- Oedipus:* Oh city! City!
- Creon:* I too have a share in the city; it is not only you! 630
- Chorus:* Cease, lords! Opportunely for you both I see
Jocasta coming out of the house, with whose help
The present quarrel must be set right.
- Jocasta:* What is this senseless strife of tongues
That you have raised, you wretches? Are you not ashamed, 635
When the land is so sick, to stir up private evils?
Will *you* not get into the house? And you, Creon, into
your halls?
Will you stop inflating a little nothing into a great woe?
- Creon:* Sister! Oedipus, your husband, deems it just 640
To do terrible things to me, selecting one of two evils—
Either to drive me from the land of my fathers, or to take
and kill me!
- Oedipus:* I confirm this: for I have caught him, oh wife,
In the act of harming my body with evil craft.
- Creon:* May I not benefit, but meet accursed destruction, if to you
I have done any of the things which you charge that
I have done! 645
- Jocasta:* In the name of the gods, Oedipus, trust these things!
Especially in reverence for this oath before the gods,
And then also for me and for these men here who stand
before you!
- Chorus:* Be willing and mindful to be persuaded, I pray you, lord!²³

²³ Here the meter changes from a previously continuous iambic to a more excited pace, until 696.

Oedipus the Tyrant

- Oedipus:* In what should I willingly yield to you? 650
- Chorus:* Show reverence for him who before was no childish babbler,
And who now is great in his oath.
- Oedipus:* But do you know what things you are asking?
- Chorus:* I know.
- Oedipus:* Explain, then: what are you saying?
- Chorus:* That you should never cast a friend who is liable to a curse 655
Into the dishonor of an accusation whose account lacks
evidence.
- Oedipus:* Know for sure that when you seek these things, you seek
for me
Destruction or exile from this land!
- Chorus:* No! By the chief god of all gods, the Sun! 660
May I, godless and friendless, perish by the worst fate,
If I have such a thought!
But for ill-fated me, the land in its withering
Wears away my heart,
If your evils are to join with the evils of old.²⁴
- Oedipus:* Well, let him go then! Even if I must utterly perish,
Or be cast violently, in dishonor, from this land. 670
It is your voice, not his, that moves me to compassionate pity.
But this fellow will be hated, wherever he may be!
- Creon:* You are obviously hating even while yielding, and you
are harsh,
When beyond limits in anger. And such natures
Are justly most painful for themselves to bear. 675
- Oedipus:* Will you not leave me, and get out?
- Creon:* I will depart: happening upon
Lack of comprehension by you, but fairly judged by these.
- Chorus:* Woman, why do you delay to conduct this man within
the house?
- Jocasta:* When I have learned what this is that has chanced to occur. 680
- Chorus:* An opinion that did not know of arguments
Came up; and even what is not just devours.
- Jocasta:* On both sides?
- Chorus:* Yes.

²⁴ The meter in this sentence is broken, and the text appears to be corrupt.

Jocasta: And what was the argument?

Chorus: It's enough—for me at least, it seems enough, when the
land is 685
Already laboring—to let it remain where it was broken off.

Oedipus: Do you see where you have come to, though you are a
good man
In judgment, by seeking to relax and blunt my heart?

Chorus: Lord, I have said more than once:
Know that I would be evidently a mad man, bereft of
prudence, 690
If I turned away from you,
Who, in labors
Distraught, set aright my dear land with a fair wind. 695
And now lead on, if you can.

Jocasta: In the name of the gods, teach me too, lord, what in the
world
Has set you in such a rage!

Oedipus: I will tell—for you, more than these, I revere, wife— 700
About Creon: the sorts of things he has plotted against me!

Jocasta: Speak, if you will clarify the quarrel through accusation.

Oedipus: He declares that it's been established that I am the murderer
of Laius!

Jocasta: Knowing this himself, or having learned it from another?

Oedipus: It was that very evildoing prophet, whom *he* sent in—since 705
He keeps his own mouth free entirely.

Jocasta: Now do not be concerned about these matters that you
are speaking of,
But listen to me and learn why, as regards you,
There is nothing mortal that possesses the prophetic art.
And I shall with concision make plain to you the evidence
for these things. 710

For an oracle once came to Laius—I will not say
From Phoebus Himself, but from His servants—
To the effect that it would be his fate to die at the hand
of that child,

Which would be born from me and him.

And yet he was one day—as is reported anyway—by
strangers, 715

Who were robbers, murdered, at a triple crossroad!

But as for the child, not three days separated it from birth,

When that man, yoking together the extremities of its feet,
Cast it—by another's hands—upon a trackless mountain.
And in that case Apollo did not bring it about 720
That the child became the murderer of his father, nor
that Laius

Suffered the terrible thing that he feared from the child.
Such were the things stated with precision by the prophetic
utterances!

—Concerning which, pay you no regard; for whatever
the god

Seeks as needed, He Himself easily makes manifest. 725

Oedipus: As soon as I hear such a thing, wife,
My soul is disturbed, and my mind stirred up!

Jocasta: With what sort of worry do you speak, thus upset?

Oedipus: I think I heard you say this: that Laius
Was slaughtered near a *triple* crossroad. 730

Jocasta: For so it was rumored, and never ceased.

Oedipus: And where is the place, where this was suffered?

Jocasta: The land is called Phocis, and the divided roads
Lead to the same spot from Delphi and from Daulis.

Oedipus: And how much time has there been since these things of
which you've spoken? 735

Jocasta: It was right before the time when over this land you
Became manifestly the ruler, that this was announced in
the city.

Oedipus: Oh Zeus, what have You decided to do to me?

Jocasta: What's this in your heart, Oedipus?

Oedipus: Do not ever ask of me! But this Laius, his nature— 740
Explain it to me, and at what peak of youthful age he was.

Jocasta: Tall, head just starting to get white,
And in form not far from yours.

Oedipus: Alas, misery! It seems that I have, without knowing,
Cast myself under a terrible curse! 745

Jocasta: What is this utterance? I shrink as I look at you, lord!

Oedipus: I am in terrible despair, lest the prophet might have vision;
But you will make it clearer, if you speak out one more thing.

Jocasta: Though I shrink, I shall hearken to what you say and reply.

Oedipus: Did he travel light, or with many armed 750
Men in attendance, in the manner of a man who is a ruler?

- Jocasta:* They were in all five in number, and among them was
A herald; and a single wagon carried Laius.
- Oedipus:* Alas! Now things are clear! Who in the world was it
Who spoke these reports to you all, wife? 755
- Jocasta:* A certain house servant, who arrived as the only one who
survived.
- Oedipus:* And does he happen to be present now? In the house?
- Jocasta:* No indeed. For as soon as he returned and saw the
supreme power
In your hands, and Laius destroyed,
He beseeched me, grasping my hand, 760
To send him out to the fields, to the pasturing of flocks,
So that he would be as far as possible from sight of this city.
And I sent him; since he deserved, in the way of a man
Who is a slave, a gift of gratitude even greater than this.
- Oedipus:* So how might he come swiftly back to us? 765
- Jocasta:* It can be done; but why do you enjoin this?
- Oedipus:* I am afraid, oh wife, lest I have myself said all too much;
And therefore I now wish to see him.
- Jocasta:* Well, he will come. But surely I too deserve to learn
The matters that weigh heavily on you, my lord. 770
- Oedipus:* And you will not be kept from learning how far
My forebodings²⁵ have taken me; for to whom better
Could I speak than to you, finding myself undergoing
such a fortune?
My father was Polybus in Corinth,
My mother the Dorian Merope. I was held to be the
greatest man 775
Among those of the townsmen there, before a piece of
ill luck
Befell me, worthy of wonder,
But surely not worthy of the seriousness with which I took it.
For a man filled with drunkenness at a feast
Over the wine called out at me that I was a fictitious son
of my father. 780
And I, distressed, for that day
With difficulty restrained myself; but I went the next day

²⁵ The word means primarily "hopes."

To my mother and father and put them to the test; and
they bore ill
The speech of blame made by that one who had let it loose.
And I was delighted by the two of them; but nevertheless 785
This always chafed me. For it very much got under my skin.
So I went to the Pythian, unbeknownst to my mother and
father.
And in regard to what I beseeched, Phoebus
Sent me away without honoring me with a reply; instead,
for me,
As one miserable, He prophesied terrible and wretched
things— 790
How I must have intercourse with my mother, bringing
to light offspring
Whom mankind would find unbearable to look upon!
And how I would become the murderer of the father who
begot me!
And I, when I heard these things, henceforth measuring the
Location of the land of Corinth by the stars, fled 795
To where I might never see brought to fulfillment the disgrace
Of the evils that had been foretold for me.
On my way, I arrived at that place where
You say that this tyrant was killed.
And to you, wife, I will tell the truth: when 800
On my journey I approached this triple crossroad,
There I encountered a herald and a man
In a horse-drawn wagon, such as you speak of;
And the one leading, together with the elder one himself,
tried to
Thrust me violently off the road. 805
And I, in anger, struck the one pushing me aside, the driver;
And when the elder saw this,
Watching when I had gotten next to the wagon, he
Came down on me with his double whip right in the
middle of my head.
He paid not an equal penalty, but 810
Being struck hard by a staff in this hand, backward
He rolled, straight out of the middle of the wagon.
And I kill them all! And if this stranger
Has any kinship with Laius, then
Who is more miserable than this man here and now? 815

Who could become a man more hateful to divinity?
 One whom it will not be possible for either strangers or
 townsmen
 To receive in their homes, or to address in speech, but
 whom
 They must thrust from their homes! And in these regards
 it was no one
 Other than I myself who enacted these curses on myself! 820
 And the bed of the dead one is being defiled by these
 hands of mine,
 Which also destroyed him. So then am I by nature evil?
 Am I not wholly unclean, if I must go into exile,
 And, as an exile, no longer find it possible for me to see
 my own people,
 Nor to set foot upon the land of my fathers—or else, to
 have to marry 825
 My mother, and to slay my father Polybus,
 Who begot and raised me?
 Would not someone who ascribed these things to a savage
 deity
 Be judging with right reason such a man?
 Never, never, oh sacred reverence of the gods, 830
 May I see that day! But may I from mortals
 Vanish, before seeing such a
 Stain of misfortune come upon me!

Chorus: For us, oh lord, these things are dreadful; but until
 You have learned from the man who was present, retain hope! 835

Oedipus: Yes, so much of hope remains for me,
 Only to await the man, the herdsman.

Jocasta: But when he has appeared, whatever is it that you desire?

Oedipus: I will instruct you: if it is found that he says
 The same things as you, I shall have escaped suffering. 840

Jocasta: But what special account did you hear from me?

Oedipus: *Robbers*, you said, were the men who *he* said
 Did the killing; so, if still
 He will say the same number, then I did not do the killing!
 For one cannot become equal to the many. 845
 But if he will speak out clearly of a man who was a lone
 traveler,
 Then, at that point, it is the case that the deed flows toward me.

Oedipus the Tyrant

- Jocasta:* But know that it was thus that the report appeared,
And that he cannot take this back again.
For the city heard these things, not I alone. 850
Even if, therefore, he should turn away from the earlier
account,
Never, oh lord, would the murder of Laius
Come to sight as justifying the correctness of what Loxias
Precisely said in the oracle, that he would die at the hands of
A child of mine. And surely that wretched one never 855
Did the killing, but rather was himself destroyed before.
So as regards prophecy I would look neither
Here nor there.
- Oedipus:* Nobly do you believe. But nonetheless
Send someone to summon the worker, and do not neglect this. 860
- Jocasta:* I will send speedily; but let's go into the house;
For I would do nothing that is not dear to you.
- Chorus:* May Fate be with me as I maintain the
Pious purity in speeches,
And in all deeds, which are prescribed by the laws— 865
That stand high above, brought into being through heavenly
Aether, and of whom Olympus
Alone is the Father; nor
Were they from the mortal nature of men
Begotten; nor shall forgetfulness 870
Ever lay them to sleep.
Great in these is the god, nor does He ever grow old!
Hubris begets a tyrant. Hubris, if
Vainly overfilled with many things
That are neither timely nor advantageous, 875
Having scaled the topmost ramparts,
Storms to the edge of the precipice of necessity,
Where no footing is of use.
Still, the forceful wrestling contest that is noble for the city
I pray the god never to dissolve: 880
The god I shall never cease to hold
As protector.
But if someone haughtily with his hands
Or in speech makes his way,
Without fear of Justice, or 885
Pious reverence for the seats of the divinities,

May an evil Destiny seize him,
On account of ill-fated arrogance,
If he does not gain his gain justly,
And avoid impieties; 890
Or if he, in vanity, touches the untouchable things.
What man ever again in such circumstances
Shall ward off the shafts
Of anger from his soul?
For if such deeds are honored, 895
Why should I dance as the Chorus?²⁶

No longer shall I go to the untouchable
Omphalos²⁷ of the earth in reverence,
Nor to the temple at Abae,²⁸
Nor to Olympia, 900
If these things cannot be pointed to
As being in harmony, before all mortals.
But, oh Wielder of power—if indeed You hear this
correctly—
Zeus, lording over all things, let it not escape notice
From You and Your deathless, everlasting rule! 905
For now they are obliterating
The withering, ancient,
Divine pronouncements concerning Laius,
And nowhere is Apollo manifestly honored!
And the divine things are disappearing! 910

Jocasta: Lords of the land, the thought has come to me
That I ought to go to the temples of the divinities,
Bringing in my hands these wreaths and incense offerings.
For Oedipus raises his heart to too high a pitch,
With all sorts of sufferings; nor does he, as a man of
intelligence, 915
Let strange new matters be interpreted in the light of
ancient;
He is in the power of whoever speaks, if the speaker tells of
Fearful things. So since I am making no headway with
my advice,

²⁶ The dancing was understood to be an act of pious devotion.

²⁷ See 481–482 above.

²⁸ A city in northwest Phocis with a rich temple.

- To You, oh Lycian Apollo, since You are the nearest,
I come as a suppliant with these symbols of prayer, 920
So that You might vouchsafe us an illuminating²⁹ way out.
For now we all shrink back at the sight of that stunned
Pilot of our ship, as it were.
- Messenger:* Might I learn from you, strangers, where
The halls are of the tyrant, Oedipus?
Or better yet, where he is himself, if you should know. 925
- Chorus:* These are the chambers, and he himself is within, stranger;
And *she* is his wife, and mother of his children.
- Messenger:* Ah, but then prosperous are you, and forever with prosperity
May you be, since you are in every way the spouse of
that man! 930
- Jocasta:* And similarly for you, stranger; for you deserve this
In return for your salutation. But explain what
You have come seeking, or what you wish to communicate.
- Messenger:* Good tidings for your home and your husband, lady!
- Jocasta:* What are these? And from whom do you come? 935
- Messenger:* From Corinth. And the word which I shall soon express
Should please—how could it not? Though equally you
would also be pained.
- Jocasta:* What is it? What is this power that it has that is thus
twofold?
- Messenger:* He is made tyrant by the inhabitants of the land
Of the Isthmus, as is announced there! 940
- Jocasta:* What? Does not the aged Polybus still hold sway?
- Messenger:* No indeed, since death holds him in the tomb.
- Jocasta:* What is this that you say? Has he then died . . . ?
[text corrupt, words missing]
- Messenger:* If I am not speaking the truth, I deserve to die!
- Jocasta:* Attendant! Why are you not running as fast as possible
to tell 945
These tidings to your master? Oh prophecies of gods,
See where you are! Oedipus, fearing long ago, fled
Lest he kill this man, and now this man
Is destroyed by chance, and not by him!

²⁹ The word may also mean “undefiled, purified, guiltless.”

[Oedipus enters.]

Oedipus: Oh Jocasta, dearest of womanhood, 950
Why have you sent for me to come hither outside
the house?

Jocasta: Listen to this man, and examine, as you listen,
The outcome of the solemn prophecies of the god!

Oedipus: But whoever is this fellow, and what does he say to me?

Jocasta: He's from Corinth, bringing the news that your father
Polybus 955
Is no longer, but has died!

Oedipus: What do you report, stranger? You yourself inform me.

Messenger: If this is what I must first make clear in my message,
Then know well that that man has departed in death.

Oedipus: Through plots, or having contracted illness? 960

Messenger: A slight tilt of the scale lays an ancient body well to rest.

Oedipus: It was through illnesses, it then appears, that the steadfast
one wasted away.

Messenger: Proportionate to his many years.

Oedipus: Alas! Alas! Why indeed, oh wife, should anyone inquire
Of the hearth of the Pythian prophet, or of the 965
Clamoring birds above—according to which interpreters, I
Was going to kill my father? He, having died,
Lies beneath the earth; and here am I,
Not having touched a weapon—unless it was out of
longing for me³⁰
That he died. Thus he would be dying on account of me. 970
But anyway, Polybus has gathered the oracles that were
present
And laid them in Hades, worthless!

Jocasta: Haven't I been predicting this for a long time?

Oedipus: So you declared; but I was led astray by fear.

Jocasta: Do not any longer keep any of those things in your heart. 975

Oedipus: But how can I not shrink from the bed of my mother?

Jocasta: Why should a human being fear, for whom the things of
fortune
Rule, and there is no clear foresight of anything? Strongest

³⁰ Or, literally, "my longing."

Oedipus the Tyrant

Is the life that takes things as they come, within one's
power.

And do not let yourself fear marriage rites with your mother! 980
For in their dreams too, many before, among mortals,
Have slept with their mothers; and he for whom these things
Count for nothing bears life most easily.

Oedipus: Nobly would all these things have been spoken by you,
were it not
That it happens that the one who bore me still lives; but
now, since she 985
Does live, there is every necessity, even if you do speak
nobly, to shrink back.

Jocasta: The tomb of your father is a great sign, at any rate!

Oedipus: Great, yes, I understand: but there is fear of her who lives.

Messenger: But whatever woman is it whom you fear?

Oedipus: It is Merope, old fellow—with whom Polybus dwelt. 990

Messenger: But what is it about her that induces fear in you two?

Oedipus: A terrible prophecy from a god, stranger.

Messenger: Is it utterable? Or is it not lawful for another to know?

Oedipus: Surely: for Loxias once told me
That I would have to have intercourse with my mother, 995
And shed the blood of my father with my own hands.
On account of which I long ago distanced myself from
Corinth—

With a fortunate outcome, to be sure, but nevertheless
It is most pleasant to see the eyes of one's parents.

Messenger: Was it really because you were shrinking from these
things 1000
That you became an exile from the city?

Oedipus: Seeking not to be the murderer of my father, old man!

Messenger: So why indeed do I not free you from this fear, lord,
Since I have come in a friendly frame of mind?

Oedipus: And you would get a deserved thanks from me!

Messenger: And the chief reason I came was so that 1005
I would prosper somehow upon your return home.

Oedipus: But I shall never go where I might be with those who
begot me!

Messenger: Oh child! It is clear that you are in noble ignorance
of what you are doing!

- Oedipus:* How so, old man? In the name of the gods, teach me!
- Messenger:* If it is on account of *these* that you flee from a return home . . . 1010
- Oedipus:* For I dread lest the outcome might prove Phoebus clear-sighted as regards me.
- Messenger:* Fearing lest you contract some pollution from those who begot you?
- Oedipus:* This is the very thing, elder, this is what always frightens me!
- Messenger:* Well do you know then that there is no justice at all in your trembling?
- Oedipus:* How not, since I am born the child of these parents? 1015
- Messenger:* Because Polybus was no relation of yours!
- Oedipus:* What are you saying? Polybus did not beget me?
- Messenger:* No more than the man I am, but equally!
- Oedipus:* And how can the one who begot me be equally so with a nobody?
- Messenger:* But neither of us, neither that man nor I, sired you! 1020
- Oedipus:* But then for what reason did he name me his child?
- Messenger:* Know that he received you as a gift once upon a time—from my hands!
- Oedipus:* And being thus from another's hands, he still cherished me so greatly?
- Messenger:* Yes, for his previous childlessness swayed him.
- Oedipus:* Had you purchased me, or had you sired me, when you gave me to him? 1025
- Messenger:* I had found you in the woody glens of Cithaeron.³¹
- Oedipus:* And why were you traveling in these parts?
- Messenger:* I was here in charge of mountain flocks.
- Oedipus:* So you were a shepherd, wandering in lowly service?
- Messenger:* And of you, child, the savior, in that time! 1030
- Oedipus:* What pain was I suffering when you took me up in your hands?
- Messenger:* The extremities of your feet should bear witness.

³¹ A mountainous ridge ringing Thebes to the south; see also 421 above. Cithaeron is addressed as personified and alive by the chorus at 1086ff. and by Oedipus at 1391.

Oedipus the Tyrant

- Oedipus:* Alas, what is this ancient evil of which you speak?
- Messenger:* I freed you, the extremities of whose feet were pierced.
- Oedipus:* A terrible disgrace I acquired when in swaddling clothes! 1035
- Messenger:* With the consequence that you are named who you
are—from this misfortune.³²
- Oedipus:* Before the gods! By my mother or my father? Tell me!
- Messenger:* I don't know; the one who gave you knew these things
better than I.
- Oedipus:* So then you did not in fact yourself chance upon me,
but took me from another?
- Messenger:* No, but another shepherd gave you to me. 1040
- Oedipus:* Who is this? Do you know how to describe him in
speech?
- Messenger:* He was, I think, designated as one of the men of Laius.
- Oedipus:* The tyrant of this land long ago?
- Messenger:* Exactly. He was a herdsman of that man.
- Oedipus:* And is he yet living, this fellow, so that I could see him? 1045
- Messenger:* It would be you natives of this place who would
best know.
- Oedipus:* Is there someone among you standing near
Who knows the herdsman of whom he reports,
And has seen him either out in the fields or hereabouts?
Inform, as the time has come for these things to be
laid bare! 1050
- Chorus:* I think that it is no one other than the fellow in the
fields whom
You earlier sought to see; but
Jocasta here would be informed in speaking about these
matters.
- Oedipus:* Wife, you know the fellow whom just now
We sent orders to come: is he the one of whom this
man speaks? 1055
- Jocasta:* Why speak of him? Take no heed! It is vain
To deliberate about or to remember the things that
have been said!

³² The name Oedipus is a conjunction of the word for “being swollen” (*oideo*) and the word for “foot” (*pous*).

- Oedipus:* It cannot be that when I receive
Such evidence I do not bring to light my parentage!
- Jocasta:* Do not—before the gods!—if you care at all for your own life, 1060
Inquire into this! I am sick enough as it is!
- Oedipus:* Take heart! For *you* would not become evidently vile,
even if it should become
Evident that I am descended from three generations of
slave mothers!
- Jocasta:* Nevertheless obey me, I beseech you, and do not do
these things!
- Oedipus:* I would not obey, if it means not learning clearly about
these things! 1065
- Jocasta:* But I am thinking prudently, in saying to you what is best.
- Oedipus:* This very “best” has for a long time pained me!
- Jocasta:* Oh ill-fated one! May you never know who you are!
- Oedipus:* Who will go and bring the herdsman hither to me?
And let this woman take pleasure in her rich lineage! 1070
- Jocasta:* Alas! Alas! Wretched one! This is all I have to say
To you, and never anything more.
- Chorus:* Why has the woman rushed off, Oedipus,
In savage pain? I fear lest
From this silence there burst forth evils. 1075
- Oedipus:* Let whatever will, burst forth; but my origin,
Even if it be lowly, I wish to see.
And she probably—for she is high-minded in a woman’s
fashion—
Is ashamed of my low birth.
But I, assigning myself to being a child of Fortune, 1080
The benevolently generous, shall not be dishonored.
For I am born by nature from Her as mother; and
the kindred
Months have marked out for me lowliness and greatness.
And being such by nature I would never turn out
To be otherwise, such that I would not learn my lineage. 1085
- Chorus:* If indeed I am a prophet
And in judgment sound,
You shall not—by Olympus!—
Oh Cithaeron, fail to experience by tomorrow’s full moon
Yourself by Oedipus 1090

Exalted, as land of his fathers and
Nurse and mother,
And by us celebrated in the choral dance,
As the bearer of benefactions
To my tyrants! 1095

Phoebus-of-the-cry, to You
May these things be agreeable!

Who was it, child, Who bore you,
Who of the long-living ones³³
Mingled with the mountain-roving Pan, as 1100

Your father? Or was it one who bedded with³⁴
Loxias? For to Him all the broad
Pastures are dear.

Was it the Lord of Cyllene,³⁵
Or was it the Bacchic god,³⁶ 1105

Dwelling on the mountain peaks,
Who received you as a lucky find from one
Of the dark-eyed Nymphs—with Whom
He most frequently plays?

Oedipus: If I too, elder, who have surely never had dealings with
him, must 1110

Make a judgment, I believe that I see the herdsman,
Whom we have long sought. In length of
Age he is consonant with this man,
And what is more, those who are conducting him
I recognize as my own servants. But in knowledge you
presumably 1115

Would be superior to me, since you've seen the herdsman
before.

Chorus: Indeed I have recognized him, know well. For he was
A trusted herdsman of Laius, if any was.

Oedipus: You, who are the Corinthian stranger, I ask first:
Is this the one you refer to?

³³ The Nymphs (see below, 1108).

³⁴ Accepting the emendation proposed by Arndt; the manuscripts read "daughter."

³⁵ Hermes, who was associated with Cyllene, a mountain peak in Arcadia.

³⁶ Dionysus.

- Messenger:* This is he, whom you now see. 1120
- Oedipus:* You there, elder! Look at me and speak up in answer
To whatever I ask! Did you once belong to Laius?
- Servant:* Yes: as a slave not purchased, but raised in his house.
- Oedipus:* At what task did you toil, or what livelihood?
- Servant:* I followed the flocks for most of my life. 1125
- Oedipus:* What parts of the land did you inhabit for the most part?
- Servant:* Cithaeron; and sometimes also the neighboring area.
- Oedipus:* Are you aware of having met this man somewhere in
those parts?
- Servant:* Doing what? What man are you speaking of?
- Oedipus:* This one who is present! Haven't you dealt with him in
some way? 1130
- Servant:* Not so that I could speedily recall and say so.
- Messenger:* No wonder, master; but I will now refresh with clarity
The recollection of the unknowing fellow. For I know well that
He knows of the time when we both in the area of
Cithaeron—
He with two flocks, and I with one— 1135
Passed with this man three whole six-month periods,
From spring until the rising of Arcturus,³⁷
And for the winter I would drive mine to their quarters,
And he simultaneously would drive his back to the
pens of Laius.
—Am I speaking of what happened, or not? 1140
- Servant:* What you say is true, though from a long time ago.
- Messenger:* Come now, speak! Do you know that at that time there
was a certain child
You gave to me so that I might bring him up as my
own nursling?
- Servant:* What is this? Why do you report this account?
- Messenger:* This is he, fellow, the one who was at that time young! 1145
- Servant:* Destruction seize you! Will you not be silent?
- Oedipus:* No, don't punish him, elder!—since it is your words
That deserve punishment more than his!

³⁷ In September.

Oedipus the Tyrant

- Servant:* But how, oh best of masters, do I err?
- Oedipus:* By not telling about the child of whom this man inquires! 1150
- Servant:* Because he talks in ignorance, and labors in vain!
- Oedipus:* If you won't speak for favor, you will speak in shrieks
of pain!
- Servant:* In the name of the gods, do not abuse me, an old man!
- Oedipus:* Won't one of you quickly twist his hands behind his back?
- Servant:* Ah unhappy one, why? What do you wish to learn? 1155
- Oedipus:* Did you give to this man the child about whom he inquires?
- Servant:* I did give him; I would have been better off perishing that day!
- Oedipus:* But you will come to that, unless you say what is just!
- Servant:* Much more certain is my ruin, if I should speak!
- Oedipus:* The man, as it appears, is trying to delay. 1160
- Servant:* No, indeed I am not; I said already that I *did* give him!
- Oedipus:* Where did you get him? From your home or from
someone else?
- Servant:* Not from my own home; I received him from someone.
- Oedipus:* From which of the citizens here and from which house?
- Servant:* Do not—in the name of the gods, do not, master!—
inquire further! 1165
- Oedipus:* You are destroyed, if I have to ask these things again!
- Servant:* Well, he was one of the offspring of the house of Laius.
- Oedipus:* A slave, or one of his family?
- Servant:* Alas! I have come to the terrible part of what I have to say!
- Oedipus:* And I to hear; but all the same it must be heard. 1170
- Servant:* It was said to be the child of *him*. But she within,
Your wife, would be able to explain most nobly how it was.
- Oedipus:* Was it she who gave him to you?
- Servant:* Precisely, lord.
- Oedipus:* To do what with him?
- Servant:* So that I would do away with him.
- Oedipus:* A mother so wretched? 1175
- Servant:* Shrinking before evil divine prophecies.
- Oedipus:* Of what sort?
- Servant:* The report was that he would slay his parents.
- Oedipus:* So how was it that you gave him over to this old man?

Servant: Out of pity, master, and supposing that he would
Carry him away to another land, where he dwelt; but he
Preserved him for the greatest evils; for if you are yourself 1180
The one whom this fellow says, know that you were born
ill fated!

Oedipus: Alas! Alas! All things have come out clearly!
Oh light, may I now look upon you for the last time,
I who have become
Manifest as born from whom I ought not to have been,
and
In intercourse with whom I ought not, and slaying
those whom I should not! 1185

[*Oedipus exits.*]

Chorus: Oh generations of mortals!
You while living
I count as equal even to nothing!
For who, what man,
Bears of happiness more than 1190
So much as appears,
And, having appeared, declines?
Having your example,
Your divine guide, yours—oh
Wretched Oedipus!—of mortals 1195
I count nothing blessed!
Who, having shot your bow all too well,
Became the master of every happy prosperity—
Oh Zeus!—when you destroyed
The Prophesying Maiden with hooked talons,³⁸ 1200
And stood as a wall against deaths for my land!
On account of that, you are called my king,
And are honored with the greatest honors while lording
over great Thebes.
But about whom is it now more miserable to hear?
Who in such toils, such savage disasters, [line corrupted] 1205
Dwells, after such reversal in life?

³⁸ The Sphinx.

Alas! Famous head of Oedipus!
For whom the same great harbor
Served the son and the father,
To sink into, as bridegroom; 1210

How, oh how, were the furrows of your father
Ever able to bear you, miserable one, for so long in silence?
All-seeing Time has found you out, unwilling, and
brings to justice
The marriage that has from long ago been no marriage,
Begetting and begotten. 1215

Alas, child of Laius!
Would that you—yes, you—
Had never been seen by me!
How I lament
As one pouring forth a dirge from my lips! 1220

To speak what is correct, it was from you that I recovered
my breath
And closed my eyes in sleep.

Messenger You who are, of this land, always to the greatest degree
[from honored,
within]: What deeds you will hear of, and what see, and
how much
Grief will you bear, if indeed you yet have a native 1225
Attachment to the halls of the Labdacids!
For I think not even the Ister or the Phasis³⁹ would
Wash clean this home, so many are
The evils that it hides, or will immediately bring to light—
Voluntary, and not involuntary. And of woes, 1230
Those are especially painful which are evidently
self-inflicted.

Chorus: The ones we knew of before are not easy
To bear; what more are you speaking of?

Messenger: The speech that is quickest to utter and
To understand is that the divine head of Jocasta has died! 1235

³⁹ The Ister is our Danube, and the Phasis is a river beyond the Black Sea, perhaps the Rioni in the Caucasus.

Chorus: Oh the miserable one! By what cause?

Messenger: She caused it herself. Of the things that were done,
The most painful is not present: for the sight of it
is not here.

But nevertheless, as much as is in my memory,
You will learn, of that miserable woman's sufferings. 1240

For when, frantic with passion, she passed within
The vestibule, she went straight to the bridal
Bed, tearing at her hair with the tips of both hands.
Slamming the doors when she went inside,
She called out to Laius, now long a corpse, 1245

Recalling those ancient seeds, by which
He would die, and would leave behind a child-bearer
Who would make, with those of his own, children accursed.
And she bewailed the bed where, ill fated, she
Bore doubly, husband from husband and offspring from
offspring. 1250

But how it followed upon these things that she was destroyed,
I no longer know. For in burst Oedipus, shouting, on
account of whom

It was not possible to see her misfortune through to the end,
Because our eyes turned upon him instead, as he rushed
around.

For he went to and fro, asking us to provide him with a sword, 1255

And asking for the wife who was not a wife, but the
mother in whom

Double pregnancy had occurred, of himself and his children.

And in his frenzy one of the divinities guided him—

For it was none of us men who were present:

With a terrible shout, as if led by some guide, 1260

He rushed the double doors, from their sockets

Bending the doors inward; and fell into the room—

Where we saw, within, the woman hanging,

Entwined in woven swinging cords!

And he, when he saw, crying out terribly, the poor man, 1265

Loosened the hanging rope. And when upon the earth

He lay the wretched one, then terrible to see was what
followed.

For, tearing from her the golden pins of her garments,
With which she was adorned,
And raising them, he struck his own eyeballs, 1270

Shouting such things as that thereby they would not now see
Either the things he had suffered, or the sort of evils that
he had done,
But would henceforth in darkness look at those whom
they ought not,
And not recognize those whom he wished to recognize.
Chanting such imprecations, he repeatedly, and not once only, 1275

Raised up and smote his eyes. And at the same time the
bloody
Eyeballs spattered his cheeks, nor was there released mere
Damp drops of gore, but suddenly a dark
Shower of torrential blood soaked him.
These are the evils that from two, not only from one,
have broken forth, 1280

And are rather the commingled evils of husband and wife.
The prior ancient prosperity was present
As a just prosperity; but now on this day
Groaning, ruin, death, shame—whatever
Names there are for evils—none are absent! 1285

Chorus: But is the wretch now in some rest from evils?

Messenger: He shouts for the doors to be opened, to show
To all the Cadmeans the one who is the patricide, the
one who
With his mother—he shouts things impious and
unutterable for me—
Meaning to hurl himself in banishment from the land,
nor will he any longer 1290

Remain in the home, as cursed with the curse that he
brought down.
But of course he is in need of the strength of someone
as a guide.
For his illness is greater than he can bear.
But he will show this to you too; for he is here opening
the doors.

You will soon see a sight 1295
Such as would evoke pity even from those who abhor it.

[Oedipus enters.]

- Chorus:* Oh suffering terrible for humans to see!
 Oh most terrible of all that I
 Have ever before encountered! What madness, oh
 miserable one,
 Has fallen upon you? Who is the divinity that 1300
 With a leap longer than the longest
 Has sprung upon your demon-cursed fate?
 Alas, alas, hapless one! To look upon you
 I am unable—though I wish to ask many things,
 To learn many things, to perceive many things: 1305
 Such is the horror you give to me!
- Oedipus:* Alas, alas, miserable am I!
 Where upon the earth am I carried in my wretchedness?
 Where is my
 Voice borne in flight upon the air? 1310
 Oh divinity, how far you have leapt!
- Chorus:* Into something so terrible that it is not to be heard or seen!
- Oedipus:* Oh my revolting cloud of darkness,
 Unspeakable in its descent,
 Irresistible, and sped by an ill wind, 1315
 Alas!
 Alas again! How I am pierced at the same time by
 The stab of these goads and by the memory of evils!
- Chorus:* And it is no wonder that in such woes
 Evils doubly grieve and doubly compel you to think! 1320
- Oedipus:* Ah, friend!
 You are still my steadfast minister! For still
 You remain, caring for me, the blind one!
 Alas, alas!
 For you have not forgotten me, but I recognize clearly, 1325
 Even though in darkness, your familiar voice!
- Chorus:* Oh you doer of terrible deeds! How did you endure to thus
 Extinguish your eyes? Who of the divinities urged you on?
- Oedipus:* Apollo it was, Apollo, friends—
 Who brought to completion these evil, evil sufferings of mine! 1330
 But he who struck with his own hand now

Oedipus the Tyrant

Was no one but I, the miserable one.
For why ought I to see,
For whom, in seeing, there was nothing sweet to see? 1335

Chorus: These things were even as you declare.

Oedipus: What indeed for me is to be seen,
Or cherished, or what greeting
Is yet to be heard, in pleasure, friends?
Lead me away from this place 1340

As quickly as possible;
Lead me away, oh friends—
The massively ruined one,
The thoroughly accursed one,
And moreover, to the gods, 1345

The most hateful of mortals!

Chorus: Wretched equally in your mind and in your fortune!
How I wish that I had never, ever known you!

Oedipus: May he be cursed, whoever it was who from the savage
fettters,
As a herdsman on the meadows, released me, and from death 1350

Defended and saved me—
Doing no kindness!
For if I had died then
There would not be such anguish for loved ones
Or for me! 1355

Chorus: This I too would have wished.

Oedipus: Then I would not have come as the murderer of my
father at least,
Nor would I have become notorious among mortals
As the bridegroom of her from whom I am sprung.
But now I am miserable, 1360

And the child of those who are impious,
The miserable fellow-begetter with those from whom
I am myself begotten.
But if there is by nature some more awesome
Evil than evil, 1365

This is the lot of Oedipus!

Chorus: I do not know how I can pronounce you one who has
deliberated in a fine manner; for you would

Have been in a superior condition if you were no longer
existing, instead of living blind.

Oedipus: That these things are not in this way done best,
Do not teach me, and do not continue to give me
counsel.

1370

For I do not know with what eyes I could see, and
Ever look upon my father when I go to Hades,
Nor again upon my miserable mother, the two of whom
by me

Have been done deeds too great for hanging!
And would the sight of children be desirable

1375

For me to approach, when their growth has been as the
growth

In this case? No, never for these eyes of mine!

Nor would the town, nor tower, nor sacred statues
Of the divinities, from which I, the wholly miserable,
who was once

Cherished as the single noblest man among those in
Thebes at least,

1380

Exiled myself—I, who announced that

All should cast off the impious one, the one who by
the gods

Was made manifest as impure and of the race of Laius.

When I had made evident such defilement as mine,

Was I going to look upon these with steady eyes?

1385

By no means! Nay, if with regard to hearing, there were a
possibility of

A blocking of the source through the ears, I would not
have held

Back from cutting off my miserable body,

So that it might be both blind *and* hearing nothing. For

It is sweet to dwell with one's thinking, away from evils.

1390

Ah Cithaeron, why did you receive me? Why did you
not take me

And immediately kill me, so that I would never have
shown

Myself to humans here in my origins? Oh Polybus,

And Corinth, and what were said to be the ancient ancestral
Halls! In what beauty did you then

1395

Oedipus the Tyrant

Nurture me—while I was festering with evils underneath!
But now I am discovered as being evil, and as from evil ones.
Oh triple paths and hidden ravine,
Thicket, and narrow place where three roads meet,
Which drank my own blood, from my father, shed by
my hands,

1400

Do you then still remember me, as the one
Who did the deeds in your presence—and then the things I did
When I came hither? Oh marriage rites, marriage rites!
You begot us, and having begotten us, again
Sent forth the same seed; and revealed

1405

Fathers being brothers, children being blood of the same family,
Brides being both wives and mothers, and the coming
into being

Of whatever deeds are most shameful among humans!
But, since it is not noble to speak out what it is not noble to do,
In the name of the gods, as quickly as possible, hide me

1410

Somewhere out and away, or kill me, or cover me with the sea,
Where nevermore you will see me!
Come, deign to touch a miserable man!
Obey, do not be afraid! For my evils
No one of mortals is capable of bearing except me!

1415

Chorus: But as regards what you ask for, here comes Creon just
in time
To act and to deliberate, since
He alone is left, instead of you, as the guardian of the land.

Oedipus: Alas, what word shall we speak to him?
What trustworthy just claim is evident in me? For

1420

I am revealed to have been evil in every regard in the
past to him!

Creon: Not as one laughing, oh Oedipus, have I come,
Nor to lay blame concerning past evils.
But if you all are not yet ashamed before the offspring of
mortals,
Then at least you should feel awe before the fire of the
Lord Sun,

1425

Who nurtures all things; and should not display in so
unveiled a way

Such a pollution, as neither earth
Nor sacred rain nor the light welcomes!
But as quickly as possible conduct him into the house!
For that the evils of kin, by kin alone 1430

Be seen and heard, is what piety requires.

Oedipus: In the name of the gods, since you have torn me from
expectation,
You, the best, coming to me, the worst man,
Grant me something; for it is for your sake, not for mine,
that I speak!

Creon: And what is it that you thus so imploringly ask of me? 1435

Oedipus: Hurl me from this land as quickly as possible, out
somewhere
Where I will encounter no one of mortals!

Creon: That is what I would do, know well, if it were not that first
The god must be consulted, to learn what ought to be done.

Oedipus: But the entire pronouncement of That One has been
made clear— 1440

That I, the patricide, the impious one, am to perish!

Creon: Thus were these things said; but nevertheless, given how
we stand
In need, it is better to learn what we ought to do.

Oedipus: So will you then inquire about a miserable man?

Creon: Yes, and now you too will put faith in the god! 1445

Oedipus: And on you I lay this charge, and I will exhort you:
For her who is in the house, set up whatever tomb you
wish—

For you will carry out correct rites for your own—
But as regards me, never consider that this town of my
fathers

Deserves to have me as a member so long as I live; 1450

But let me dwell in the mountains, among which
There is this one of mine, called Cithaeron—which my
mother

And my father appointed as sovereign tomb for me
while I was yet living;

So that I may die at the hands of those, who tried to
destroy me.

—And yet this much at least I know, that neither illness 1455

Nor anything else would destroy me; for I would never
Have been saved from dying, unless for a terrible evil.

But let our destiny proceed where it will;

And as regards the male children, do not, Creon,

Take upon yourself trouble for me; they are men, and so they 1460

Will never lack a livelihood, wherever they may be.

But as regards my two miserable and pitiable maidens,
From whom my dining table, of me as a man, was never
set apart,

But of whatever I tasted,

Of all these things they too partook: 1465

Take care of both of them for my sake! And especially,
let me

With my hands touch them and lament the evils!

Come, oh lord!

Come, you who are noble in your birth! If I could
touch with my hands,

I would seem to hold them, even as when I could see. 1470

What am I saying?

Surely I do not hear—before the gods!—my two dear ones

Weeping? And has not Creon taken pity on me,

And sent those two kin who are dearest to me?

Is what I am saying so? 1475

Creon: It is as you say; for I am the one caring for these things,
Since I know the delight this gives you now, as it did in
the past.

Oedipus: But may you have good fortune, and for you on this path
May there happen to be a better guardian divinity than
mine!

Oh children, where are you? Come hither, come 1480

To these brotherly hands of mine,

Which served as hosts to arrange it so that the previously
bright eyes

Of the father who begat you might thus see—

He who, oh children, neither seeing nor inquiring,

Was brought to light as father where he himself was sown. 1485

And I weep for you two, for I lack the strength to look
at you,
Bearing in mind the bitterness of the rest of the life
That you two must lead among humans.
For into what sort of assemblies of citizens will you come,
And into what festivals, from which you will not in tears 1490

Return home instead of enjoying the spectacle?
And when you arrive in your prime at the age of marriage,
Who will it be, children, who will risk
Taking on such reproaches as will be baneful to my
Parents and at the same time to you two? 1495

For what of evils is not present? Your father
Killed his father; he sowed in the mother
From whence he himself was born, and
Acquired you from the same sources from which he
himself was born.
With such things will you be reproached; and then
who will marry you? 1500

There is no one, children; but it is clear
That you must perish barren and without husbands.
Oh child of Menoeceus, since you alone are left as father
To these two—since we both, who begat them,
Have the two of us perished—do not let them, your kin, 1505

Neglected, wander as beggars in the absence of husbands!
Do not make theirs equal to my evils,
But pity them, seeing them at such an age
Deserted by everyone, except insofar as it is up to you!
Nod assent, oh well-born one, touching with your hand! 1510

And to you two, children, if you already had prudent
judgment,
I would give advice about many matters; but now make
this prayer:
That I should live always wherever is opportune, and that
you should
Have a better life than that of the father who begat you!

Creon: You have wept enough; now go inside the house. 1515

Oedipus: Is obedience necessary, even though in no way pleasant?

Creon: Yes, for all things opportune are noble.

Oedipus the Tyrant

Oedipus: Do you know on what conditions I am going, then?

Creon: You will say, and then I will know, having heard.

Oedipus: If you send me away as an exile from the land.

Creon: What you ask of me is a gift of the god.

Oedipus: But it is by the gods that I have become most hated!

Creon: Therefore you will probably receive it!

Oedipus: So you agree to these conditions, then?

1520

Creon: Yes, for I do not like to speak in vain what I do not think.

Oedipus: Then take me away from here now.

Creon: Go, now, and take leave of the children.

Oedipus: No! Do not take these away from me!

Creon: Do not wish to hold sway over everything!

Indeed, the things over which you have held sway have
not followed you in life!

Chorus: Oh indwelling fathers of Thebes, behold! Here is Oedipus,
Who had insight into the famous riddles, and was the
strongest man,

1525

Who without the envy of citizens, and while looking
fortune in the face,

Has come to such a wave of terrible misfortune!

As a consequence, being mortal, one sees, looking closely
at that

Final day, that no one is to be congratulated as prosperous,
until

He completes the term of life having suffered nothing
painful.

1530